

AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH

JERUSALEM AND BAGHDAD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER

Confidential

Not for publication

Newsletter #4

1950-51

Jerusalem, Jan 8, 1951

The approach of the Christmas season brought with it a lull in the activities of the School. The lull, was not, however, altogether of our own choosing. We had hoped to begin excavation at Herodian Jericho about December 1st, and with this in mind had been trying for month to get the Government to approve the use of refugee labor for this project. In spite of intermittent prodding by Mr. Harding and ourselves, it was impossible to get a definite answer in time to begin work before Christmas. Six members of the School took advantage of the enforced lull to visit neighboring Arab countries. Mr. Thompson went to Iraq, Dr. Pritchard, Miss Mowry, Dr. Morton and Mr. Odgen to Egypt. Hence December was for them anything but a wasted month. It is highly desirable that students who go to the expense of coming to Palestine should see as much as possible of the other countries associated with the Biblical story.

Two local trips were made earlier in the month. The first was to the cave near Ain Feshka where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. We intended going to Herodium, but found traffic held up because of the fact that H.M. the King was going to Hebron that morning. Rather than wait an indefinite period until the royal party passed, we decided to change our plans and go to Ain Feshka. While two members of the party went to Jericho to secure the permit necessary for visiting the cave, the rest spent the time at the Dead Sea, paddling in the sticky waters, or walking along the beach picking up pieces of bitumen and cakes of salt. The north end of the Dead Sea presents a desolate scene now. Nothing remains of the Potash Company's plant or of the Jewish pleasure resort but shattered skeletons of buildings - tragic reminders of the passions which engulfed, and which still engulf, this land.

The needed permit having been obtained, we proceeded on our way. The dirt track runs between the western shore of the sea and the line of towering cliffs some distance to the right. In the face of these cliffs a number of caves can be seen. We had gone only a short distance south when the trail turned in toward the cliffs. It was impossible to proceed far; so leaving the three cars behind, we continued on foot. The particular cave which was our objective could not be seen from below, but a splash of light-colored soil on the face of the cliff marked its location, for this soil was the refuse thrown out by the excavators of the cave. The climb to the mouth of the cave is fairly steep but all succeeded eventually in reaching it, after several halts for breath. The cave is small and unimpressive, and it is difficult to realize that this significant hole held for centuries one of the most important treasures ever found in Palestine. One wonders what may still be hidden in this ancient land. The day of surprises is not yet past.

We took the opportunity of poking our heads into some of the other caves in the vicinity, but nary a scroll did we find. Rumors of the existence of other Dead Sea Scrolls continue to circulate but it is difficult to discover if any substance lies behind the rumors. An inscribed object - an old forgery which I hear has

been on the market for years - has already been offered to me for sale as something found in the Ain Feshka cave. Doubtless in years to come the number of ings asserted to have come from that cave will prove to be quite astonishing.

On our return from the cave we drove into Jericho and around some of the back streets in order to see the gardens for which Jericho is famous. A great variety of fruits is grown there. A poinsettia in the grounds of one of the king's wives particularly caught our eye. As we came back to the main street King Abdallah and his retinue drove by. The street was lined with cheering children. As a matter of fact, when we drove into Jericho we were mistaken for part of the royal entourage and given a cheer. We acknowledged it with as much royal grace as we could muster. From modern Jericho we drove two miles NW to see the winter residence of Herod the Great which was uncovered by Dr. Kelso last winter.

Our first attempt to reach Herodium having failed, we made a second and successful attempt on December 9th. Herodium lies about four miles SE of Bethlehem. It marks another residence of Herod the Great and is also the place where he was buried. One can get only within two miles of the place by car. The rest of the journey must be made on foot, or one may hire a donkey, as Miss Jones did. Riding by some Beduin tents, she was loudly denounced for her unbecoming behavior - riding while her male escort (Emil) walked. The donkey proved unfailing until he came to the foot of the mound. Then, at sight of the towering hill, 330 feet high, his courage failed him, and Miss Jones had to make the ascent under her own power. Some climbed via the grand stairway, now ruined, of 200 steps; others followed the winding path. In either case it was a stiff climb. After enjoying the extensive view from the top and inspecting the ruins of the fortress, we took shelter in the "crater" and ate our lunch. Was it a bad conscience that led Herod to build in this desolate spot? Surely only a tyrant haunted by fear would have selected such an out-of-the-way site for a residence and a tomb.

Apart from the field trips, our academic program this month has consisted of several evening sessions around the fireplace in the Director's House at which papers were read by members of the School. Father Murphy gave a paper on "Moab", Dr. Pritchard one on the "Gilgamesh Epic", and I one on "The Site of Bethel". Coffee and cookies at the close assured an enjoyable evening.

Accustomed as we were to the fuss and frenzy which accompany the Christmas season at home; we found it difficult to realize that the festive season was really upon us, for here life went on much as usual. However, six days before Christmas, the Old City suddenly assumed a slightly gayer appearance with green branches and paper festoons over some of the shops. This turned out to be in honor of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad rather than of Christ. Since the Moslem calendar is a lunar one, the Prophet's birthday falls on a different day of the Christian calendar each year. It was nice that this year Moslems and Christians were able to celebrate almost simultaneously. A breath of the Christmas spirit from home was wafted to us on the 23rd with the arrival of a big batch of Christmas mail.

The day before Christmas was a day of religious celebration in Bethlehem. The short road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem was opened only to members of the diplomatic corps and a few other dignitaries. The rest of the Christians had to take the long, roundabout and dangerous route via Abu Dis. Fortunately, the weather was nice and there were no accidents. A number of us attended the service held by the Lutherans in the YMCA property near the Shepherds' Field. Dr. Canaan took us in tow and conducted us into the large cave which is called

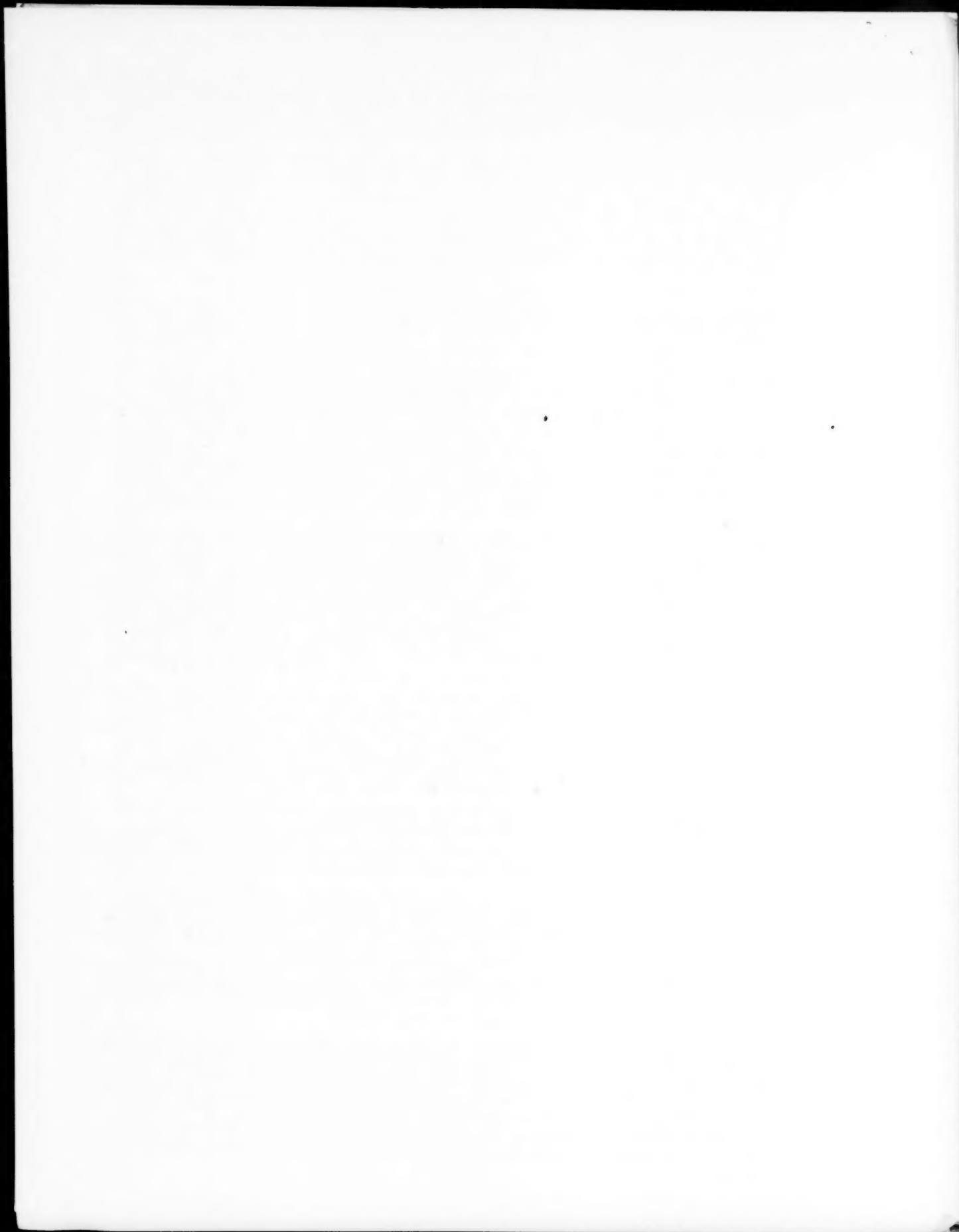
on one side of the hill. The cave terminates in an open-air grotto. On one side of this grotto an oven had been constructed and in it a sheep was being roasted. Dr. Canaan explained that the oven is heated for three hours until the stones are red hot, then the fire is removed, the sheep put in, and the entrance sealed up with stones and earth. As we watched, attendants began removing the steaming earth and stones, and then pulled out a large metal tray filled with pieces of deliciously cooked lamb. The sheep is usually roasted whole but this year, in order to facilitate the distribution of the meat, it was cut up beforehand. Each piece was rolled in a flap of Arab bread and handed out. One serving formed a fairly substantial meal.

Following the distribution of the lamb, an open-air service was held. An Arab choir, standing in the shelter of the grotto, led in the singing of Christmas carols. Bethlehem was hidden behind the slope of the pine-crested hill on which we stood, but to the north we could see the Russian tower on the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem. As dusk settled down over the scene and the stars came out and the lights of the neighboring villages began to twinkle, the spirit of Christmas seemed finally to have returned to the land of its birth. The most fitting place of pilgrimage on Christmas Eve seemed to be the Manger at Bethlehem, so after the service we drove into Bethlehem to the Church of the Nativity and went down into the grotto. Most members of the School stayed on to attend midnight mass in the Latin church, but my wife and I returned to the School with our young daughter.

Christmas Day passed quietly but enjoyably. Mahmud, the gardener, had made two Christmas trees from some branches cut off the evergreen trees in the School grounds. One was set up in the dining-room, the other placed in our living-room for Jane. Clippings from the cedar hedge were used to decorate the rooms. Eleven sat down to a Christmas dinner of turkey and plum pudding. Two of the eleven, were guests from across the line. We expected to have a party of six American clergymen, headed by Dr. Ralph Earle of Kansas City, for dinner as well. They had flown across on the 22nd to spend Christmas in the Holy Land and stayed three nights at the School. At the last minute they received permission to cross the line into Israel, so left us with an extra turkey on our hands, as well as a magnificent box of chocolates which they had presented to my wife. Another absentee was Dr. Morton. He had gone down to Egypt and planned to return on the 24th but found himself stranded there. The train carrying him back to Cairo broke down with the result that he missed his plane. He was unable to get another reservation until the 27th. Christmas 1950 will doubtless be long remembered in the Morton household. Christmas Night we had a buffet supper around the fire-place in the Director's House. Then we sang Christmas carols and toasted marshmallows until bed-time. I think everyone enjoyed it, although thoughts of home and loved ones were often in our minds.

The extra turkey prepared for the suddenly departed clergymen came in useful on the night of the 27th when we wished to join with those at home in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the School. So many members of the School were away that we did not feel like having a formal dinner with invited guests. But Father Murphy proposed a toast to the School and I made a brief reply. Just as I finished my remarks "Prodigal Son" Morton appeared and all formality disappeared in the general rejoicing at his safe return to the fold.

Other events of December included a trip to Dhiban to show Mr. Harding our sounding. He expressed himself as highly pleased with the results and is most anxious that work should be resumed there in the spring. On the night of the 22nd the American Consul-General and Mrs. Gibson held an At Home at the Zahra Hotel at which Mrs. Winnett and I represented the School. The following night we were invited to dinner at the Barâmkis together with the Governor of Jerusalem and the Attorney-General of Jordan.



Recent guests at the School were the following: Miss Bessie Plant of Nigeria, Rev. J.W. Swearingen, Evansville, Ind., Rev. R.L. Adams, Bethlehem, Pa., Rev. G.A. Harris, Kenbridge, Pa., Rev. M.H. Snyder and Rev. L.R. Downey, Terre Haute, Ind.

Dr. Pritchard arrived back from Egypt on Jan. 2nd, Miss Howry on the 3rd. The second term of the 1950-51 session is about to begin. May it be as profitable and enjoyable as the first!

F.V. Winnett, Director.